



2022 SOMERS BEACH STATE PARK
PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSION #2

JULY 28, 2022
6:00 PM



WELCOME



A view from the Somers Beach shoreline

Thank you for joining us!

The purpose of this session is to provide an opportunity to:

- (a) learn about the planning process for Somers Beach State Park and hear where we are in our timeline;
- (b) gain a sense for what we have heard through our public participation opportunities and how we are using that information; and,
- (c) to ask questions.

Participants are encouraged to visit FWP's website to learn more about this effort:
fwp.mt.gov/stateparks/somers-beach

USING ZOOM AND MEETING LOGISTICS



A view from the Somers Beach shoreline (July 2022)

- The **session is being recorded** and will be posted on our website.
- We have allocated time during this session for **questions**.
- The session will offer participants with the opportunity to express **amenity preferences**, similar to what we did at last week's open house.

WHERE WE ARE IN OUR PROCESS



OCTOBER 2021:
Somers Beach property acquisition.

DECEMBER 2021:
Decision notice for interim development plans issued.

PHASE 1

MARCH 2022: A scoping survey and a virtual information session to gather public input are conducted.

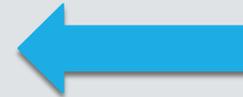
PHASE 2

JULY 2022: An open house is held to gather public input and answer questions.

PHASE 3

FALL 2022: A draft environmental assessment (EA) document that highlights options and alternatives will be issued for public comment.

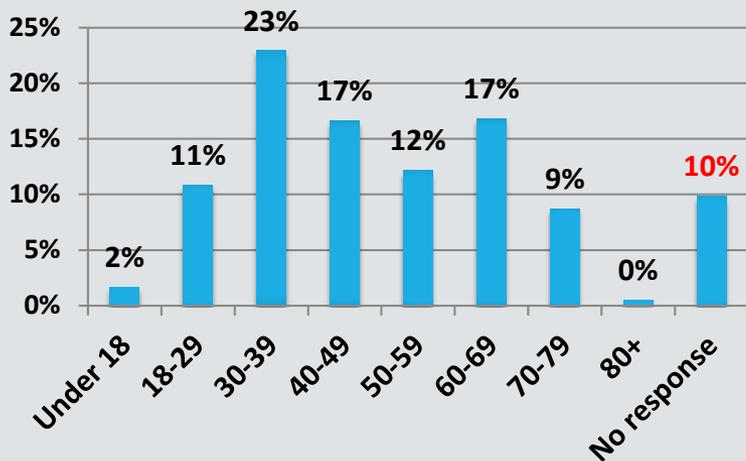
EARLY 2023: A final decision notice will be issued.



ABOUT THE SCOPING SURVEY & SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

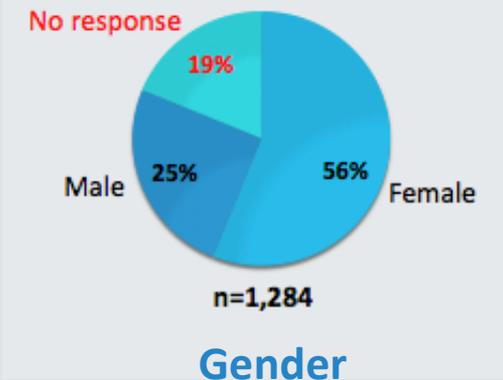


Age



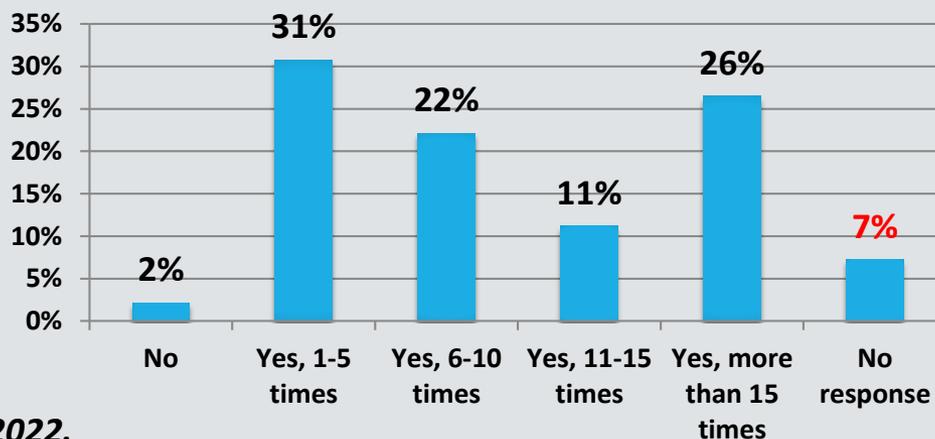
There were **1,284** unique respondents to our scoping survey. There was a strong response from individuals who indicated they live in the Flathead Valley. This cohort represented **80%** of total survey participation.

No response



Gender

Did you visit a state park in the past year?
If so, how many times?



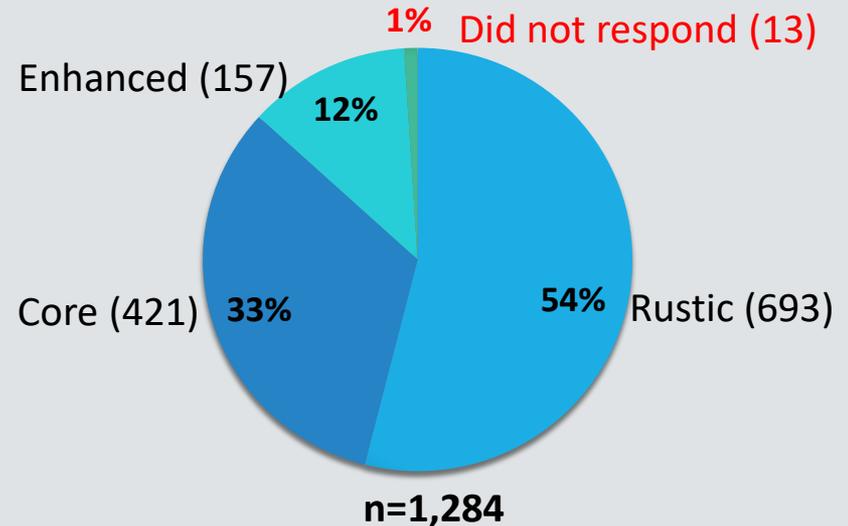
The survey took place between March 8 and April 15, 2022.

STATE PARK CLASSIFICATION: SERVICE LEVEL DESIGNATIONS



Which of the three service-level designations do you feel best would benefit Somers Beach State Park?

Just over half of the respondents (**693**) indicated a preference for the park offering a **Rustic** level of services – i.e. a site that attracts visitors who expect a self-directed experience with limited developed amenities. Meanwhile, about a third of respondents were in favor of the **Core** level which is defined as a site that provides a moderate amenity and service level.



FWP Service Level Designations

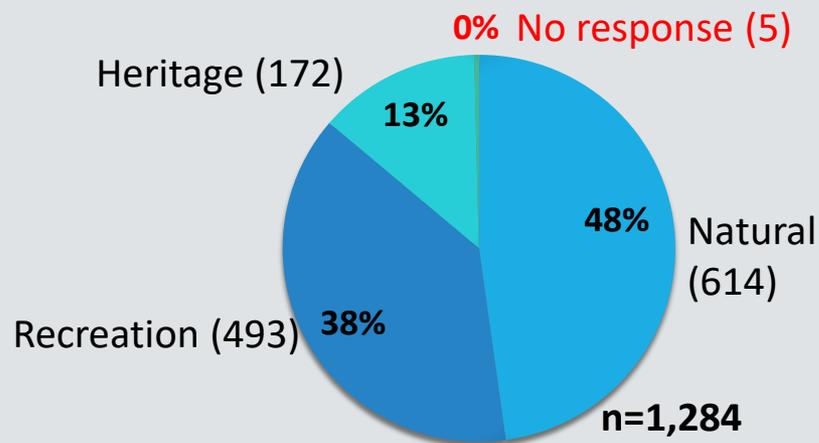
- *Rustic parks are defined as parks that attract visitors who expect a self-directed experience with limited developed amenities.*
- *Core parks are defined as parks that provide moderate amenity and service levels.*
- *Enhanced parks are defined as parks that have a high amenity level and offer several options for enhanced visitor experiences.*

STATE PARK CLASSIFICATION: EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES



Which of the three experience categories do you feel best would benefit Somers Beach?

There was a more mixed response to the question of experience categories, with a preference for the park being managed as a **Natural** or **Recreation** site. Just 172 respondents (13%) opted for it being managed as a Heritage site.



- **Natural** parks are defined as parks that connect visitors with nature in ways that may cause them to learn, reflect, and appreciate. Such experiences may provide the opportunity for solitary reflection in the presence of Montana's scenic beauty, or they may engage the visitor with others as they explore natural processes related to exceptional geologic, wildlife, botanical, paleontological, riparian and riverine environments.
- **Heritage** parks are defined as parks that invite reflection on the past by revealing the stories of Montana's cultures and histories in the very places where they occurred. Heritage parks provide opportunities to view, explore, or learn about the cultural and historic features unique to the site.
- **Recreation** parks are defined as parks that encourage play in adult and child alike through a variety of options for outdoor activity. A park may provide a specific type of outdoor recreation – e.g., fishing, camping, hiking, boating – or a mix of diverse outdoor opportunities ranging from active to passive and from solitary to social in nature.

BASE FEATURES FOR THE PARK



To safely manage and operate the park there are things we should have. This includes:

- A **parking lot** and **entrance gate**.
- An **entry/work/fee station** that will serve as a visitor contact and administrative hub near the park entrance.
- A **host site** with utilities.
- **Flush restrooms**, which are more economically and ecologically friendly.
- Access to **potable water**.
- **Universally accessible trails** that provide connectivity throughout the park and with nearby trail systems.
- **Interpretive opportunities**, accomplished through a mix of programming, signage, and/or other delivery methods.
- **Picnic areas** (location(s) and size(s) to be determined).
- A **hand launch boat ramp** (i.e., a ramp that does not offer trailer capacity. Boats must be hand-carried to the water.)
- **Park boundary delineation/screening** along roadways to direct traffic to developed entrances.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR PLANNING



- We strongly believe in promoting recreational opportunity and access for individuals of **all** abilities and ages.
- Public safety (and that of our staff) is a priority concern - we need to consider important factors such as traffic flow, co-location of amenities, minimizing visitor conflict, and other key issues in all that we do.
- Natural resource management is also one of FWP's core responsibilities. It is our duty to protect and preserve the site, and to consider ramifications for fish, wildlife, and their habitat as we contemplate human use.
- Similarly, we have a duty to protect cultural, historic, and heritage resources.
- We are committed to serving as good neighbors to adjacent landowners.
- We need to consider current **and** future maintenance and operational issues with whatever amenity we add. Additionally, staffing levels and resource capacity are all critical factors in our planning decisions.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS



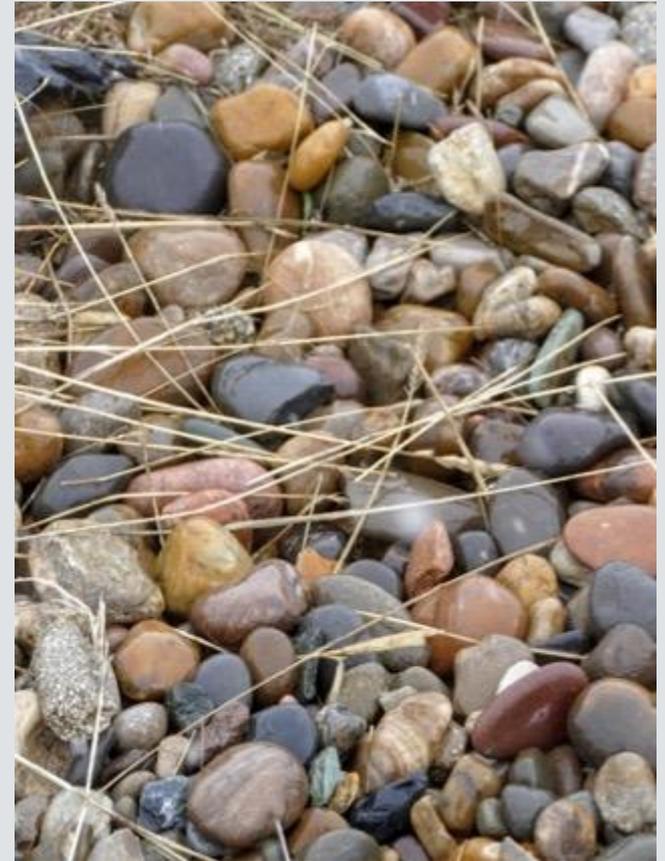
As we think about plans at Somers Beach, we must also remember:

USFWS Flathead Lake Waterfowl Protection Area

- The park is adjacent to the USFWS Flathead Lake Waterfowl Protection Area.
- As such there are some periods of the year during which there are nesting closures.

BNSF inholdings

- There are two BNSF inholdings within the park that are not available for public use.
- These inholdings are a designated Superfund site, and extensive remediation has been conducted by BNSF to contain underground contaminants.
- It will be important to not disturb the remediation or contaminants.



ORGANIZING SURVEY RESPONSES

Incorporating Public Input into Initial Ideas for the Park

In order to pull together some initial site plan ideas, we generated a list of the amenities that attracted the most interest in our scoping survey, and organized them into three areas:

- A. **Overnight Accommodations**
- B. **Land-Based Day Use Areas**
- C. **Water-based Day Use Areas**

We are **not** locked into having any of these. By contrast, we are open to additional ideas so long as they are within the “**rustic**” or “**core**” setting and aligned with attributes of “**natural**” or “**recreation**” experiences.

OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

- A. **Natural/rustic tent sites**
- B. **Tipis**
- C. **Hike in/bike in sites**
- D. **Yurts**
- E. **Cabins (Rustic/Modern)**
- F. **No overnight accommodations**

LAND-BASED DAY USE AREAS

- A. **Picnic areas**
- B. **Group use shelter**
- C. **No natural playground**
- D. **Rustic amphitheater**

WATER BASED DAY USE AREAS

- A. **Hand launch boat ramp**
- B. **Gravel beach**
- C. **Wildlife viewing platform**

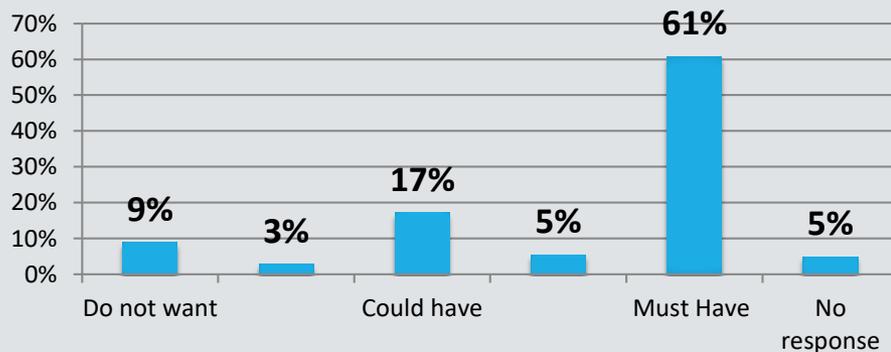
TOPIC #1: OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

Scoping Survey Results

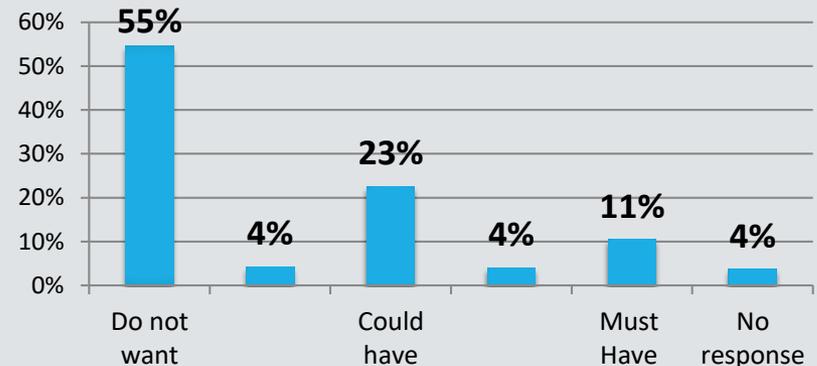
Respondents were offered the chance to rank their responses on a scale from 1-5 regarding things they did not want (1), could have (3), and must have (5).

- **61%** of respondents who indicated that the site being day use only was a “must have” however there was a small percentage of respondents open to the idea.
- **55%** of respondents indicated that allowing camping was a “do not want” however, here again, there were some mixed feelings about this.
- Of those that were interested in overnight accommodations, the **majority** suggested an interest in tent camping or a combination of tents with other options.

Day Use Only?

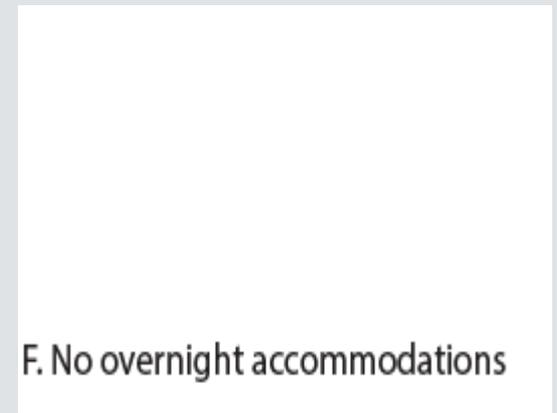
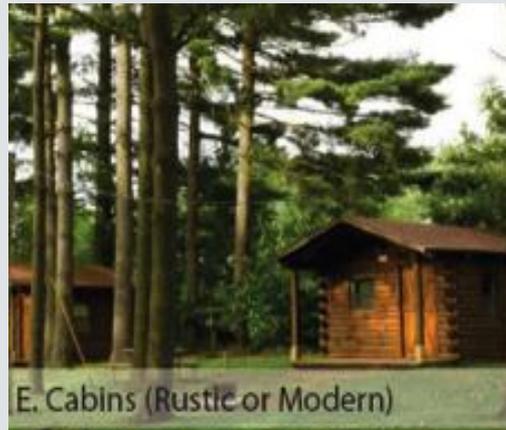


Allowing Camping?



TOPIC #1: OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

Based on input received, there are **six** main options we are evaluating for overnight accommodations:



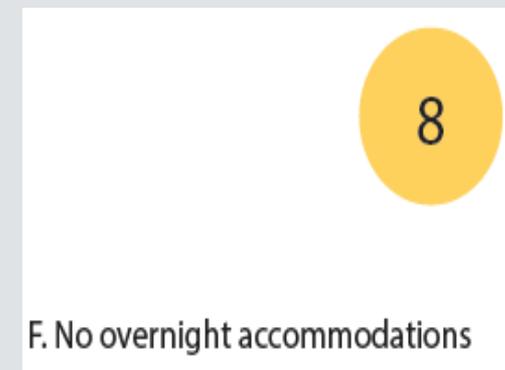
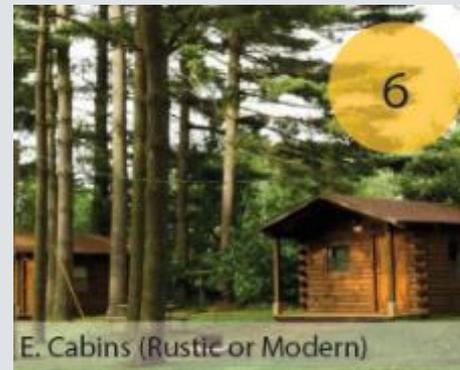
TOPIC #1: OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

Open House Feedback

23% of participants were in favor of keeping the site day use only.

77% of participants were in favor of allowing overnight accommodations.

Natural/rustic tent sites and hike in/bike in sites were the most popular selections.



TOPIC #1: OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

If we do move forward with overnight accommodations, there are **two** possible locations in the park where this could occur.

Again, FWP has **not** made a decision about overnight accommodations. This is just a starting point.

We would also need to later think about the co-location of parking, restrooms, and even how we might design trails and other amenities.



TOPIC #1: OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

Open House Feedback – Site Input

To the right you will see a map that illustrates where open house participants who were in favor of overnight accommodations thought that it could be located within the park.

Audience Participation

- **ONLINE:** You can type your question or input in the **chat** box or **raise your hand** and we will unmute you.
- **PHONE:** Dial ***9** to **raise your hand** and then ***6** to **unmute**.



STATION 1: OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

TOPIC #2: LAND-BASED DAY USE AREAS

Based on input received, there are **four** main options we are evaluating:



A. Picnic area(s)



B. Reservable group use shelter



C. Natural playground



D. Rustic amphitheater

TOPIC #2: LAND-BASED DAY USE AREAS

Open House Feedback

As you will see below, picnic areas, group use area shelters, and a natural playground were the most popular selections. Everyone wanted a day use area of some sort.



TOPIC #2: LAND-BASED DAY USE AREAS

If we do move forward with any of these amenities, there are **several** options for where they might go in the park. To the right you will see a map illustrating some of our initial ideas.

Again, FWP has **not** made a decision about these amenities. This is just a starting point.

Once a determination is clearer, we will then plan our trails, interpretive features, and other important things, like parking, restroom facilities, etc.



STATION 2: LAND-BASED DAY USE AREAS

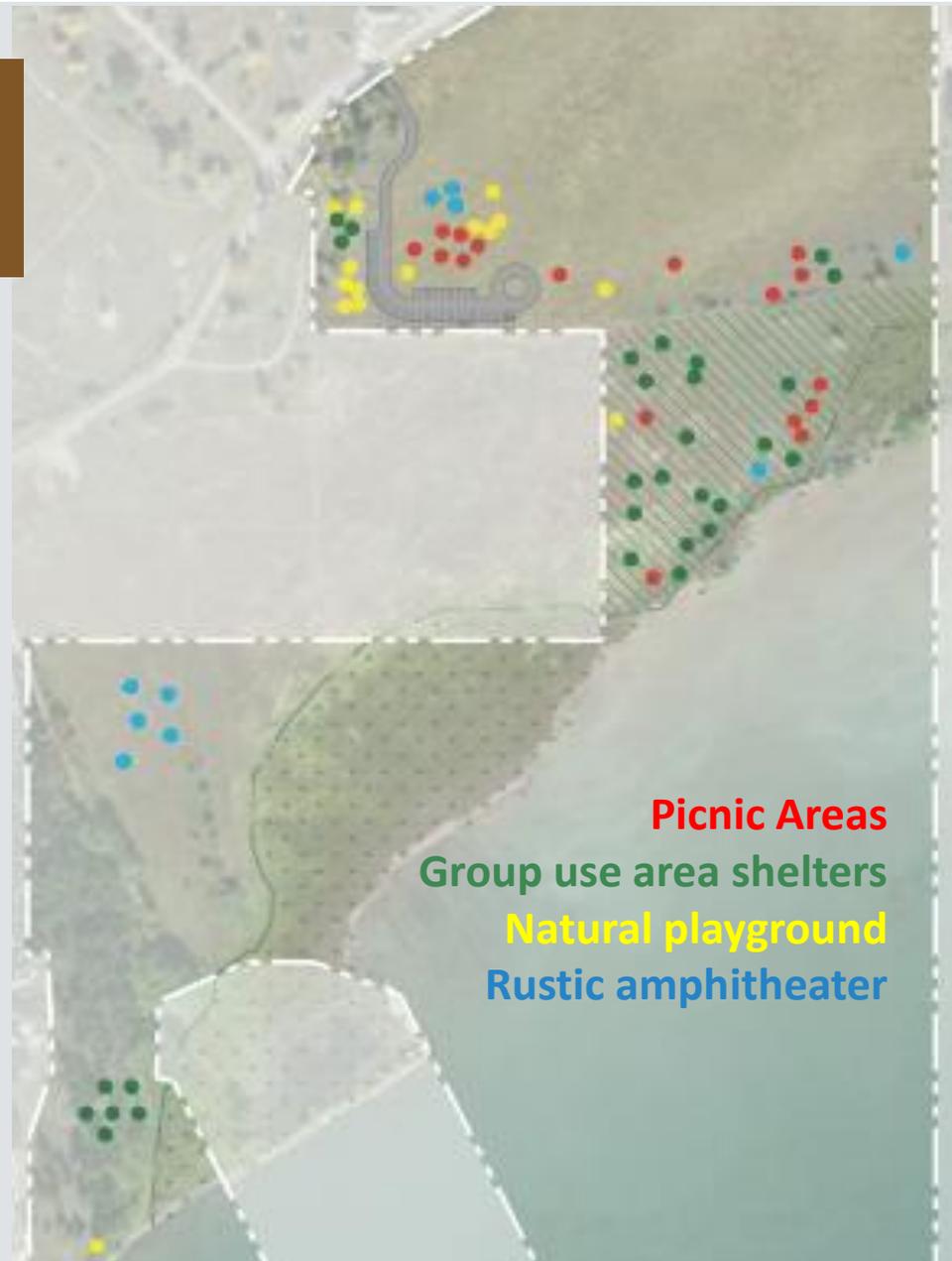
TOPIC #2: LAND-BASED DAY USE AREAS

Open House Feedback – Site Input

I'd also like to share with you a map that illustrates where open house participants identified their desired locations for our list of possible land-based day use areas.

Audience Participation

- **ONLINE:** You can type your question or input in the **chat** box or **raise your hand** and we will unmute you.
- **PHONE:** Dial ***9** to raise your hand and then ***6** to unmute.



STATION 2: LAND-BASED DAY USE AREAS

TOPIC #3: WATER-BASED DAY USE AREAS

Based on input received to date, there are **three** main options we are evaluating:



A. Hand launch boat ramp

A. Hand launch boat ramp



B. Gravel beach area

B. Gravel beach area



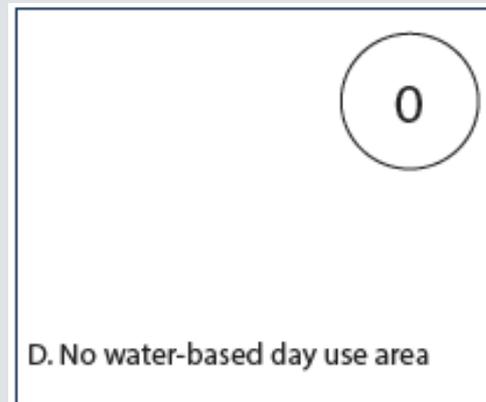
C. Wildlife viewing platform

C. Wildlife viewing platform

TOPIC #3: WATER-BASED DAY USE AREAS

Open House Feedback

As you will see below just about all of our options were popular amongst open house participants. Everyone wanted a day use area, with many in favor of more beach options.



TOPIC #3: WATER-BASED DAY USE AREAS

If we do move forward with any of these amenities, there are **several** options along or near the shoreline. To the right you will see a map illustrating some of our initial ideas.

Again, FWP has **not** made any final decisions about water-based day use areas.

Once a determination is clearer, we will then plan our trails, interpretive features, and other important things, like parking, restroom facilities, etc.



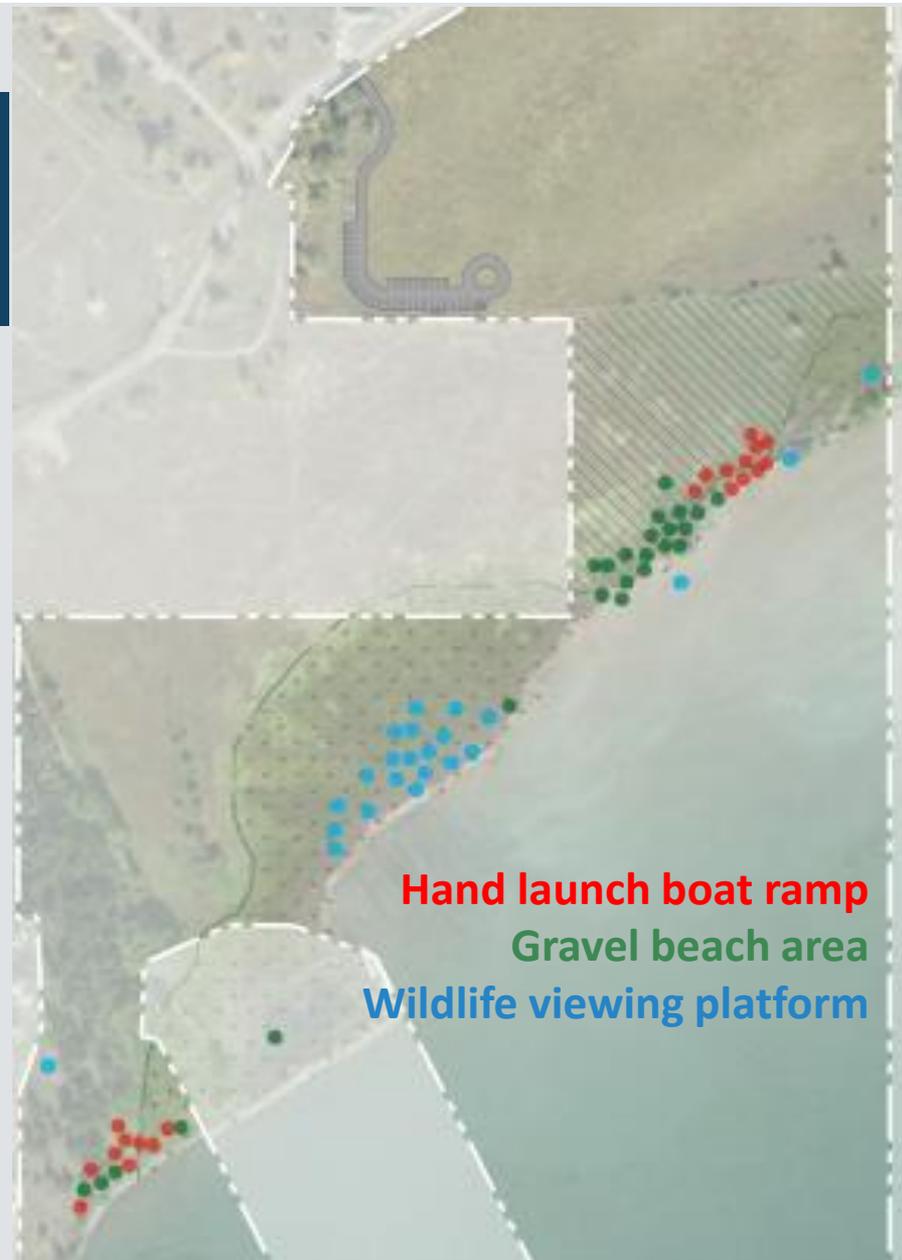
TOPIC #3: WATER-BASED DAY USE AREAS

Open House Feedback – Site Input

I'd also like to share with you a map that illustrates where open house participants identified their desired locations for possible water-based day use areas.

Audience Participation

- **ONLINE:** You can type your question or input in the **chat** box or **raise your hand** and we will unmute you.
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STATION 3: WATER-BASED DAY USE AREAS

TOPIC #4: TRAILS AND INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES

There are a few considerations when thinking about trails and interpretive approaches:

- We need to plan around areas of the park that could provide challenges, such as **flood-prone areas** and **wetlands**.
- We will be developing a **trail system** that will be **universally accessible**. It will offer connection to park amenities and services, provide wildlife viewing opportunities, and access to existing or future nearby trail systems.
- In the future we will be developing a park **interpretive plan** to help guide the use of programming, signs, and educational opportunities.



TOPIC #4: TRAILS AND INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES

Trail Users

In terms of trail users, we are thinking about **three** potential groups:

- A. Pedestrian
- B. Bikes
- C. Equestrian

We do **not** foresee allowing any motorized trail use.



TOPIC #4: TRAILS AND INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES

Trail Surfaces

In conjunction with thinking about trail users, there are **four** options we are evaluating for possible trail surfaces:

- A. Boardwalk
- B. Gravel
- C. Asphalt/Concrete
- D. Bare Earth

It is likely that throughout the park we would utilize a mix of options.

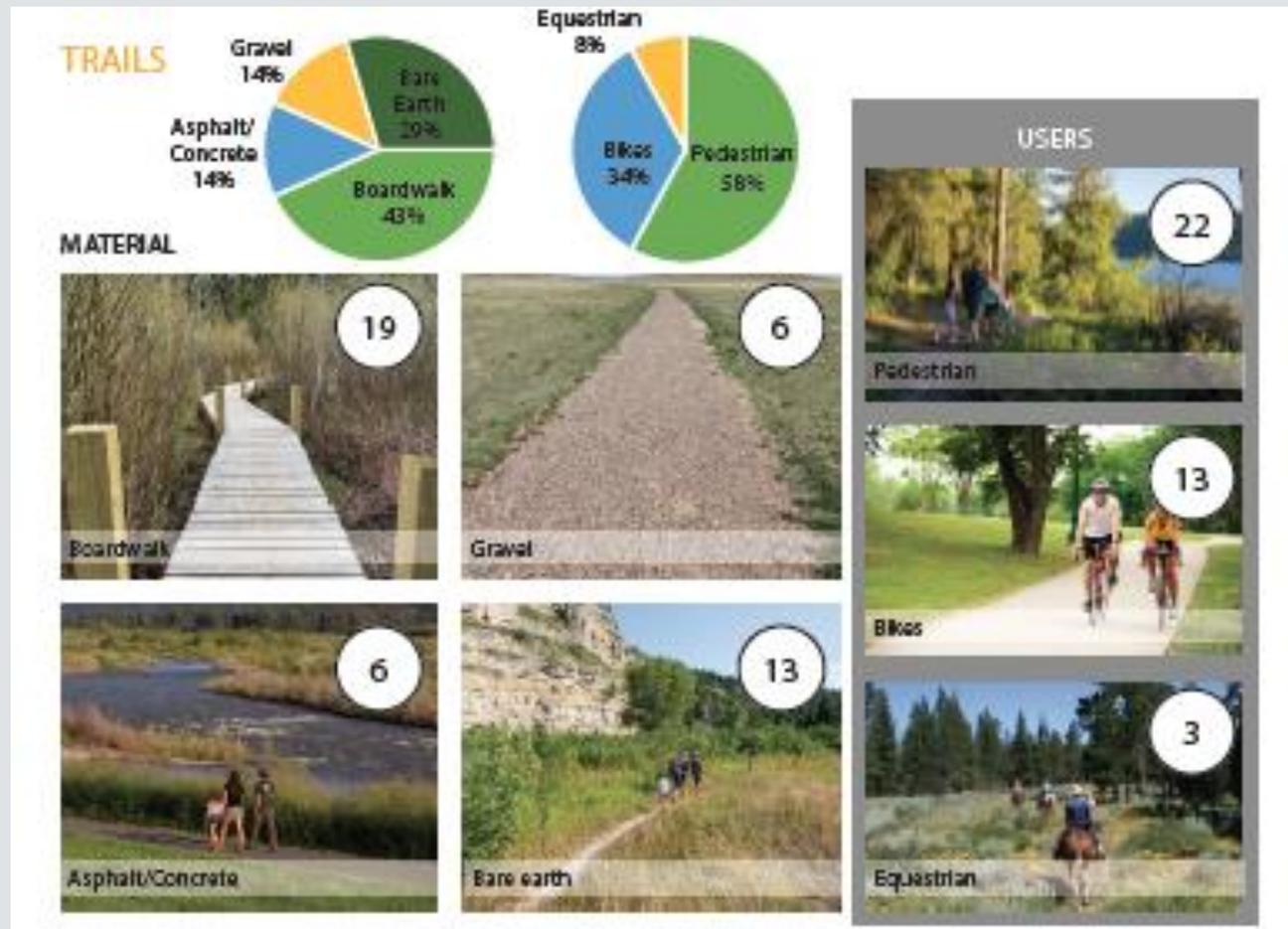


TOPIC #4: TRAILS AND INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES

Open House Results

Audience Participation

- **ONLINE:** You can type your question or input in the **chat** box or **raise your hand** and we will unmute you.
- **PHONE:** Dial ***9** to raise your hand and then ***6** to unmute.



TOPIC #4: TRAILS AND INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES

As part of our interpretive planning, we are evaluating **four** main options for possible interpretive signage and approaches:



Traditional Sign

A. Traditional signs



QR Codes

B. QR codes



Decorative Sign

C. Decorative signs



Interactive Sign

D. Interactive signs

TOPIC #4: TRAILS AND INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES

Open House Results

Audience Participation

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- **PHONE:** Dial ***9** to **raise your hand** and then ***6** to **unmute**.



WHAT IS THE DESIRED OUTCOME?



A key outcome of our process is to construct a long-term vision and development plan for the site that accomplishes the following goals:

- Provides a good cross-section of community values and desires as they relate to the development of Somers Beach State Park.
- Identifies desired park settings and a level of services, amenities, and development that are consistent with the state park classification policy.
- Establishes clear guidance for the protection and management of important natural, cultural, recreational and scenic resources, consistent with FWP's mission.
- Recommends educational or interpretive approaches that will help to broaden visitor's knowledge and appreciation of the area.
- Promotes access for all visitors and provides for their safety and wellness.
- Provides a basis for decisions related to agency operations, capital outlays, and staffing levels.



PUBLIC Q & A SESSION



A view of the Somers Beach shoreline

- This is an opportunity **to provide input and ask questions** about the Somers Beach planning process or general questions about the park.
- Remember that you will have a chance to also provide comments when we issue our **EA document later this fall**.
- To participate in the Q&A session:
 - **ONLINE:** You can type your question or input in the **chat box** or **raise your hand** and we will unmute you.
 - **PHONE:** Dial ***9** to **raise your hand** and then ***6** to **unmute**.

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING



To learn more about this effort and to access our scoping survey, visit:

<https://fwp.mt.gov/stateparks/somers-beach-planning-project>

For questions:

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FWP planning team members at Somers Beach